

**House Committee on Homeland Security**

**June 23, 2005**

**Testimony of:**

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**Director**

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**Representing:**

**North American Fire Training Directors**

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Good Morning, my name is Steven Edwards. I am currently the Director of the Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute at the University of Maryland at College Park. I also serve as the Chair of the Congressional Fire Service Institute National Advisory Committee, Chairman of the Board of the Safety Equipment Institute, and I am the immediate past President of the North American Fire Training Directors, among other state and local appointments. Previous to these positions I served with the Prince George's County Fire Department for 25 years, retiring as Fire Chief. Thank you for listening to my comments this morning as I welcome the opportunity to speak before this committee.

As an emergency services educator and trainer the process and the end result of preparing the nation's first responders to deal with weapons of mass destruction and terrorism is paramount. Firefighters and emergency medical personnel have to be properly trained and equipped to deal with these emerging threats in addition to their regular duties. The course subject matter as well as the delivery system must ensure that there is a comprehensive national training strategy that best serves the general population as well as the first responders. Unfortunately, this just does not exist.

Within the Department of Homeland Security training and preparedness for terrorism response has been centralized within the Office of Domestic Preparedness (ODP) and the Office of State and Local Government Coordination and Preparedness. Shortly after the events of 9-11 many of the leadership of fire service organizations and state and local fire training academies looked forward to working with ODP to receive guidance as well as national standard curriculum to ensure that each state and locality was prepared to respond if necessary. What we have received to date is little or no training curriculum, minimal communication, and an antiqued training delivery system. We sit bewildered as to why ODP would ignore established training systems at the state and local level.

Prior to the events of 9-11, ODP established a federal training consortium of five schools to delivery terrorism response level training. Only these selected schools could participate in this system and you had to be invited by ODP to be a part of this group. Amazingly, after 9-11, when the entire world changed and intense training in terrorism response to unprecedented levels was required, ODP keep the same system in place.

The issue is not with the training programs of the ODP consortium schools or the quality of what they present, which for the most part is good. The issue is simply that this current system is inefficient, ineffective, and does not take advantage of existing training systems and networks.

America's fire service consists of over 30,000 fire departments staffed by approximately 1.2 million career and volunteer firefighters. The fire service responds to over 22 million emergencies each year and provides a number of emergency services to the public. There is no question that in the event of a terrorism event that the fire service will be called upon to respond in the first critical moments and provide valuable life saving services. Fire departments have attempted to greatly improve upon their ability to respond to these types of events and have made substantial progress since 9-11, in spite of the inadequate attempts of ODP to provide essential training services on a broad scale.

An existing network of public safety training academies has served the needs of the nation's first responders for decades. These academies are found at the state and local level and have experienced and highly qualified instructors in fire and rescue, emergency medical services, law enforcement, corrections, and others. I will restrict my comments to fire and rescue training academies, but I know that other public safety disciplines share my concerns.

Each of the fifty states has a state fire training organization. Collectively the state fire training academies train over 800,000 students each year in an array of emergency response training programs. Hundreds of millions of dollars in infrastructure, faculty and support personnel have been invested in these academies over the years. The state fire training academies are represented by the North American Fire Training Directors (NAFTD). This group meets on a regular basis to review and discuss issues of concern to them. Over the past four years nothing has been discussed more than the issue of how can we get ODP to work more effectively with our training systems.

The Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute (MFRI), instructs over 30,000 fire, rescue, and emergency medical service students each year. Our main training facility is located in College Park and we have six regional training centers strategically located throughout the state. MFRI has over 60 full time faculty and staff and over 600 field instructors who work on a part time basis to instruct classes as needed. MFRI has trained emergency responders for 75 years. Imagine our dismay and the dismay of the entire fire service in our state to have such a system ignored by ODP. Last year in correspondence to ODP, I requested that our state be allowed to share in and teach selected ODP terrorism response training courses. This request was denied by ODP. Interesting that at the same

time our Institute was not deemed appropriate to teach ODP courses at the local level, we were training the U.S. Secret Service, in fire procedures for the protection of the President.

State fire academies have been instructed that they can use federal funds to develop terrorism response training curriculum in their state. ODP has established a review system to approve these courses. Our experience has been that this system is burdensome and a very lengthy process. The course reviews are conducted by the consortium schools, which in my opinion have no incentive to encounter more courses that they may have to compete with. Actually, this process makes little sense. What is needed is a comprehensive national training strategy for terrorism response training courses, not fifty states going their own direction with training course material. ODP could learn from many other federal agencies such as the National Fire Academy, the Emergency Management Institute, and others. When they develop a training course it is immediately handed off to the states to teach in a coordinated manner, with results returned for accountability purposes. This is an efficient system that serves the best interest of all first responders.

Regarding the cost of the programs to the taxpayer and the efficiency in which they are delivered by ODP, there are many questions. For example, the ODP training consortium can fly in three instructors from Texas to teach a course in Maryland, or I can have an instructor walk from his/her second floor office down to the classroom at our academy and teach the same course if it were available. It does not take an accountant to figure out which method is more costly. The ODP method of training course delivery simply does not take advantage of existing training resources at the state and local level.

My state and others attempt to deliver training courses as close to the students as possible to reduce costs and to increase flexibility with regard to class schedules. Much of the nation's fire service is volunteer based and they need to attend training courses on nights and weekends, since they work their regular job during the week. All state fire academies understand this and work to provide training when the audience is most available. Unfortunately for the hundreds of thousands of volunteers who need to be trained, the ODP consortium teaches their programs Monday to Friday during normal work hours.

All state fire training academies keep historical records of who is trained within their state. It is important that these records are available for certification and legal purposes. Since ODP does not work with the state systems we have no way of knowing who has been trained by ODP in our various states. Better coordination on this issue would

improve this system for the benefit of the students and have training records maintained in an appropriate data base.

Most of the state fire academy curriculum and instructors meet national certification and accreditation standards reviewed and verified by independent third party organizations, such the National Professional Qualifications Board, the International Fire Service Accreditation Service, and the American Council on Education among others. I am not aware of the standard to which ODP instructors and contractors are evaluated to in order to maintain quality in their instructional process. In the past ODP has stated that their courses “address complex subjects and often require specialized facilities or equipment” and therefore cannot be taught at the state and local level. I strongly disagree with this assertion and since their system for qualifying instructors appears to be less than what the state and local fire training academies utilize, I do not see how they came to this conclusion. Effective in 2004, ODP does allow state and local hazardous materials instructors to teach their awareness level courses without further qualification.

In February of 2005, the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) led a summit that was conducted in Washington DC and attended by sixteen of the major national fire and rescue associations. This summit grew out of frustration and concern regarding a number of issues at DHS. At this historic summit five goals were agreed upon, including:

*“To ensure the most effective utilization of training resources, the Department of Homeland Security should be required to work more closely with the National Fire Academy, national fire service organizations providing fire service related training, and state and local fire training academies regarding the use of curriculum and the delivery system for terrorism response training.”*

In April of 2005 the Congressional Fire Service Institute National Advisory Committee met and approved the summit recommendations by way of a unanimous resolution. The CFSI National Advisory Committee consists of over fifty national fire service related organizations. The issue of access to ODP training curriculum and delivery of programs is a major concern of the entire fire service within the United States.

The current ODP strategy of having a few limited training schools is inefficient and is simply not capable of delivering training courses in large volumes. Failure to recognize the qualifications of state and local instructors and work with such a proven system is a lost opportunity.

In April of 2005 after a meeting with Mr. Matt Mayer, Acting Director of the Office of State and Local Government Coordination and Preparedness action was initiated to address some of the above noted concerns. He has agreed to develop a process whereby state and local academies, with the concurrence of their State Administrative Agency, may request standardized curriculum for courses identified by SLGCP for institutionalization. This is a good start, but it needs to be followed up on and actually implemented. The state and local fire training academies anxiously await review of this process.

A partnership needs to be developed whereby ODP works with the state and local training academies to deliver needed terrorism response training in a format best suited to the success of the students. The state and local training academies are structured to deliver training in an efficient manner and can do this where the response personnel live and work, in conjunction with other training priorities. It is clear that there needs to be a better system. The state and local fire training academies are committed to work with the new leadership at the Department of Homeland Security to review the current terrorism response delivery system and make improvements where warranted. We simple want our students to be prepared to the highest extent possible.